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# The Earring

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The Earring  
by S. Ray Granade  
9/27/2018

As most of you know, I'm Ray Granade. In 1971, Dan Grant hired me fresh from graduate school at FSU to teach History and start an academic skills program at OBU. My wife Ronnie and I showed up in a U-Haul, found living quarters, and haven't left yet. Our sons Stephen and Andrew were born here and grew up in this church. Nick Stover asked that I keep my remarks to fifteen minutes; I promised that I would.

I started singing in church choirs growing up and haven't stopped. My only hiatus was during college and part of my elder son's growing up years. When our church decided to go from a part-time to a full-time Minister of Music, Lynn Worthen asked me to be one of those who visited Hope to worship under their music minister's direction and report back. So Ronnie and I drove down one Sunday and worshipped from the balcony as a much younger Will Thompson conducted the service and Janie played the organ. Talking with Lynn afterwards, I was struck that his interest in Will lay in the young man's heart for ministry, for service. Ronnie and I have talked often of Will's—and Janie's—gift of hospitality in all their dealings with people. In the intervening years, Lynn's insight into Will's character has been borne out in the way that Will has done not just music, but the myriad of other church endeavors in which he's been engaged and the intergenerational lives he's touched.

The "Will Story" that exemplifies, for me, Lynn's observation occurred when our boys were in the youth group and Will took their choir on tour in about 1992, before cell phones and social media. He asked us to chaperone and me to drive the bus. They sang their way from church to church through Mississippi and Alabama toward Chattanooga, Atlanta, and Six Flags. Once past Six Flags, we would turn and head for home.

We were north of Atlanta, staying in a high-rise motel across the interstate from a mall. We ate at the mall and gave those who wanted it some time to wander through the stores. A small group of guys—our younger son Andrew, Mike Gathright, Ramzy Halaby, and Ben Smith—headed out together. Ronnie and I stayed with the bus.

At the proper time, the group returned. They came, laughing and boisterous, and climbed aboard. Mike, Ramzy, and Andrew each sported a golden stud in his left earlobe. In the mall they had seen an earring kiosk that offered free piercing with earring purchase, and, on a dare only Ben Smith would not take, had their ears pierced. Not to worry—they knew that left was right and right was not.

That conversation continued, with variations, back to the motel. As soon as they made it into the lobby where other youth group members lounged, they lit the proverbial wildfire. We and Andrew headed upstairs with Stephen on the elevator as the news spread. We got to our room, closed the door, and Stephen said to Andrew “You’ve got to tell them the truth.” Andrew said nothing, but reached up to his left ear and took off the earring, showing us that only magnetic attraction held it in place. No lobes had been pierced in the mall, at least in their group. But he asked that we keep his—and their—secret. We agreed that the story was his to tell and promised to do everything short of lying to help him keep it secret as long as he wished.

Barely had we committed to that course before a knock came at the door. I opened it on Will, standing in the hallway. He asked if he could come in, and we immediately bade him enter. With the four of us becoming five, seating was at a premium, but we managed to make the necessary space. Andrew thoughtfully sat so that Will had an unobstructed view of his new golden stud. Searching for the right words, Will began by talking about something else, all the while glancing at Andrew’s ear, before managing to find his way to what we had already come to think of as “The Earring Scandal.” Being more prescient than he knew, Will talked about how more and more guys were getting their ears pierced. While that might be problematic, he was pleased to see that our boys had opted for discrete, simple golden studs rather than something more obvious and flashy. Not that there was anything wrong with obvious and flashy—as long as parents were OK with it.

Will carefully walked the precarious line that allowed him to be supportive and thoughtful of us while being supportive of Andrew, yet registering mild dismay at the outcome. He seemed not quite sure of our reaction, even though we were there. He had two sets of parents who remained ignorant in Arkadelphia, so perhaps he was using us to gauge potential responses. Honoring our word to Andrew, we kept his secret while letting Will know that we were not upset and certainly did not hold him in any way responsible.

Will returned to the hallway, making his way around the kids. Ramzy caved pretty quickly, revealing the story—though Dan Gathright was waiting unknowingly for the bus when we finally made it home and Mike got off wearing his earring.

Will faced one of the worst things someone ultimately responsible for other people’s kids can face. He could have easily thrown me under the bus (no pun intended), but that never seemed to enter his mind. Looking for someone else to blame has never been Will’s style. He could have berated the boys as thoughtless at best, but he chose the path of grace instead. In the midst of crisis that was bigger in that era than it would have been in

today's world of piercings, tats, and dyed hair, Will retained a warm, caring, and graceful bearing and outlook. More than anything else that night, he portrayed exactly why Lynn Worthen sent us to check him out in Hope.